critical digest

VOL. IV No. 43 June 23, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Wish You Were Here-Imperial, 6/25/52. Leland Hayward and Joshua Logan present new musical comedy by Arthur Kober and Joshua Logan with music and lyrics by Harold Rome. Direction and dances by Logan. Jo Mielziner designed sets. Cast includes Ray Walston, Sheila Bond, Jack Cassidy, Patricia Marand and Paul Valentine...A Night in Venice-Jones Beach Stadium, 6/26/52. Mike Todd's super outdoor production of new version of Johann Strauss' operetta. Directed by Jack Donohue. Script by Ruth and Thomas Martin. Cast includes Nola Fairbanks, Gloria Gilbert, Thomas Hayward and Jack Russell.

Digests of Current Reviews - Cast Changes

Paint Your Wagon-Shubert, 11/10/51. Quartet of daily reviewers who returned to Alan Jay Lerner-Frederick Loewe musical on life in a gold rush camp praised new leads as better than original. Eddie Dowling and Ann Crowling, who replaced James Barton and Olga San Juan, won applause of Sylvester, News; Rice, Post; Hawkins, World Telegram and Sun; and Sheaffer, Eagle. Newsmen called Dowling casting inspired, all noted apparent ease with which he assumed difficult role. Rice, Post, thought Dowling worked under handicap of sketchily written character and book. Hawkins still admires dance sequences as best items in show, while Sheaffer sticks to opinion that musical could have been first rate if not for weak book. Rice filed a "so-so" report, noting that due to lack of plot the show doesn't retard or advance the progress of the lyric drama.

The Fourposter-Barrymore, 10/24/51. Four more critics agree that the complete change of cast in Jan de Hartog's two character comedy don't move the show out of the hit class. Portrayals by Betty Field and Burgess Meredith in roles inaugurated by Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn won approval of Hobe, Variety; Chapman, News; Sheaffer, Eagle; and Dash, Women's Wear. New couple play it lighter than the originals, commented Variety reviewer. Team found new sentimental warmth to final scene, noted Chapman. Sheaffer and Dash agree that Field and Meredith are playing script strictly for laughs, but thanks to honest script the evening is a success.

I Am A Camera-Empire, 11/28/51. Barbara Baxley, who has replaced Julie Harris, is succeeding with distinction in delineating one of the most puzzling characters of the modern theatre, praises Hawkins, WT&S. She has taken Harris mould and proceeded ingeniously to fit it to her own purposes...The Moon Is Blue-Miller, 3/8/51. Add Hawkins, WT&S, to list of admirers for Maggie McNamara, who has replaced Barbara Bel Geddes for a summer spell in this hit. Critic found the gal perfect in the play that remains one of the sweeter jokes of the decade.

News and Notes

Rodgers and Hammerstein Foundation chartered in Albany, NY, as non-profit membership corporation to collect money and other property for charitable purposes...Representative Javits (R.NY) introduced bill in Congress to create American Academy of Music, Drama and Ballet as a branch of the Smithsonian Institute...South Pacific passed three million mark in earned profits, notes Variety...Stalag 17 closed; to tour West... Paint Your Wagon top reduced to $6..."International Theatre," new monthly to debut with special August issue covering US and World Theatre...Hobe, Variety, to act in Here's Mama with Peggy Wood at Cape Playhouse, Dennis, Mass...Beverly Baxter, London Evening Standard, resigned to devote full time to Parliament.

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' Cumulative NYC Ratings '

D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly B - Broadcast

DT - NY Times	DJC - Journal of Commerce	WCM - Chr. Science Monitor
DH - NY Herald Tribune	DWJ - Wall St. Journal	WC - Commonweal
DN - NY News	DWW - Women's Wear	WCU - Cue
DM - NY Mirror	WB - Billboard	WN - Nation
DC - NY Compass	WV - Variety	WNR - New Republic
DP - NY Post	WCD - Critical Digest	WNS - Newsweek
DJ - NY Journal American	WGN - George Jean Nathan	WNY - New Yorker
DW - NY World Tele-Sun	WWM - Ward Morehouse	WSR - Saturday Review
DB - Brooklyn Eagle	BC - WCBS Bill Leonard	WT - Time
DL - L.I.Press	BL - New Leader-WEVD	MP - Park East

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51	PROS: 19	Con: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY None: DWJ WN WNR WSR
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	PROS: 29	Con: WN
I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51	PROS: 22	Con: DN DJ WCM WNR WN So-So: DT
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	PROS: 29	Con: WN
THE MALE ANIMAL-4/30/52	PROS: 22	Con: -- None: WGN WC WN MP
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	PROS: 26	Con: WCD WGN None: WN MP
MRS. McTHING-2/20/52	PROS: 20	Con: DM DJ BC DL WNR WT WGN None: WNR MP
NEW FACES OF 1952-5/16/52	PROS: 24	Con: DP WT WGN None: WN WNR MP
OF THEE I SING-5/5/52	PROS: 12	Con: DH DJ DL DWW WB WV WCD BC WC WCU WNY WSR WT None: WWM BL WCM WNR MP
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51	PROS: 21	Con: DH DP DJ WV WWM BC WC None: BL WNR WSR
PAL JOEY-1/3/52	PROS: 28	Con: BL None: WNR
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	PROS: 25	Con: DW BL WN WNR WT
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	PROS: 29	Con: WT
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	PROS: 23	Con: DP DJ BL None: WCM WN WNR WSR

' Donaldson Awards '

Pal Joey and The Shrike casts and staff won most of the honors in the Ninth Annual Donaldson Awards, sponsored by Billboard. Winners in 27 categories were selected by 3000 ballots filled out by members of all branches of the theatre industry.

Winners in the Straight Play Division 1951-52 include: The Shrike:-Best Play and Best First Play. Jose Ferrer, The Shrike:-Best direction and best performance. Julie Harris, I Am A Camera:-Best female performance. John Cromwell, Point of No Return:-Best supporting actor. Marian Winters, I Am A Camera:-Best supporting actress. John Hodiak, The Chase:-Best debut performance. Audrey Hepburn, Gigi:-Best female debut performance. Cecil Beaton, The Grass Harp:-Best scenic designs. Audrey Gruddas, Caesar and Cleopatra;-Best costume designs.

Winners in the Musical Division 1951-52 include: Pal Joey-best musical. David Alexander, Pal Joey:-best direction. Phil Silvers, Top Banana:-best performance. Vivienne Segal, Pal Joey;-best female perfomance. Tony Bavaar, Paint Your Wagon:-best supporting performance. Olga San Juan, Paint Your Wagon:-best female debut performance. Harold Lang, Pal Joey:-best dancer.Gemze De Lappe, Paint Your Wagon:-best danseuse.

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' Green Room Department '

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CUT RATE "SING"...$3.60 top, free rent for summer and cast playing at minimum may result in Of Thee I Sing continuing. Management reports $21,000 worth of business first week of new prices, while Variety records $19,000. But the idea has intrigued the drama editors. Why can't all expensive shows open at minimum being rescaled if they succeed, asks Sylvester, News. If cooperation of all departments proves profitable, result may be a "Miracle on Sixth Avenue" raves Rice, Post. Theatre goers should support enterprise to stimulate theatre investors, urges Coleman, Mirror.

COLUMN TIPS...Shuberts want three percent gross for use of name "Ziegfeld Follies," reports Winchell...Beatrice Lillie to try recital type program at Falmouth, Mass, Playhouse, records Walker..."Brighter" fall theatre season predicted by Eaton.

SUMMER SCHEDULE...If Morehouse, WT&S, ran a summer theatre he would program Tallulah Bankhead for half a week of Hedda Gabler or The Little Foxes while second half of week she would play in Blue Jeans or Camille. Season's repertoire would include Barbara Bel Geddes in Peg O' My Heart and Isabel Bigley in The Climax.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...New Faces of 1952 gives new start to the near dying musical form -- the revue, comments Sheaffer, Eagle..."News" reporter glad "Main Street to Broadway" film out of talking stages into actual production...Number of plays written by newspapermen has fallen notes Morehouse, WT&S...Charles Coburn idea of professional actors based on college campus' to teach and form basis of permanent companies backed by Burr, Playbill.

7:00 PM CURTAIN IDEAS...Central Railroad of New Jersey commuters okayed early curtain idea in poll, reports Shanley, Times..."Show of Month Club" Sylvia Siegler urges 8:00 PM curtain for musicals, in letter written to Department of Traffic, repeats Sylvester, News..."Society of Restaurateurs" Paul Henkel argument that 7:00 PM curtain would hinder his members' operations, answered by Morehouse, WT&S, with reminder that plan would go into operation on Monday nights only... Chapman, News, against early curtain idea because he gets hungry early and he does not like to go to bed on a full stomach.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Musicals give designers the greatest pleasure in their work and the greatest freedom, Howard Bay told Pollock, Compass...Greatest word in show business is "yes," Juanita Hall, South Pacific, explained to Hawkins, WT&S. If someone suggests that a piece of business didn't work, you say "yes" and keep doing it differently until it does.

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' Theatre News Roundup '

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Yul Brynner, The King and I, celebrated 22nd year in theatre...John Golden, producer of The Male Animal, hosted James Thurber at onstage party...Main Street to Broadway film, sponsored by Council of Living Theatre, began production, interior shots will be made in Hollywood in July...Critics will be taken to first night of A Night in Venice by special limousine after dinner at the Stork Club...Kerr, Herald Tribune, spoke on "Pitfalls of Playwrights" at Dramatists Forum...MORE DONALDSON AWARDS: John O'Hara, Pal Joey:-best book. Richard Rodgers, Pal Joey:-best score. Lorenz Hart, Pal Joey:-best lyrics. Robert Alton, Pal Joey:-best dance direction. Oliver Smith, Pal Joey:-best scenic designs. Miles White, Pal Joey:-best costume designs. Gold Keys and Scrolls to winners presented on MBS Luncheon at Sardi's, CBS Stork Club and other TV and radio shows by Francis, Billboard.

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' Digests of Famous Hits - Peg O' My Heart '

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New play, new star and new theatre debuted on Broadway at the Cort Theatre, Friday, December 20, 1912. John Cort's first NY theatre designed by E.B.Cory and inspired by the Petit Trianon in France's Garden of Versailles won approval of first nighters and critics. One reviewer did note that pink seemed wrong for such a large building. Pretty ushers, who handed out engraved programs to first nighters, were decked in pannier skirts and lace caps.

Peg O' My Heart, written by J. Hartley Manners, was marked off by most of the critics as a useful vehicle for its star -- Laurette Taylor. Cast of comedy produced by Oliver Morosco included Emilie Melville, Christine Norman, Reginald Mason, Clarence Handyside, Peter Bassett, Ruth Gartland, H. Reeves-Smith and Hassard Short. Many continued in their original roles for the entire run of 604 performances. The show then toured around the country and around the world starring Miss Taylor. A.L. Erlanger revived it at the Cort on February 14, 1921, where it ran 88 performances with a cast that included A.E.Matthews and Percy Ames. A musical version, entitled Peg O' My Dreams was presented in 1924. While the film version with Marion Davies was made in 1933. The show has been a little theatre favorite for years and was recently presented at the Equity Library Theatre.

Times critic in 1912 tabbed Miss Taylor as a comedy actress of very remarkable flavor and variety. The play without her, he feared, would be like Hamlet without the Dane. Tribune reviewer praised the spark of genuine acting in the lead and her supporting cast. This script should redeem its author from his previous indiscretions at the Harris Theatre, the Tribune man commented. Herald appraiser doubted if anyone would worry about the plot in the nice, clean play which had plenty of wit and fun. "The Theatre" reviewer found it delicious entertainment acted with exquisite charm, sensibility, humor and pathos by Taylor.

Two mild dissenting views voiced in 1912 came from the trade paper NY Dramatic Mirror which felt that if the role of "Peg" had been in a better play the character would rank among best in years, and view of Darnton, Evening World, who thought star would improve when she had practiced her Irish accent more. Newspaper critic praised Hassard Short's portrayal of her cousin, but admitted that Taylor was the whole show.

Current shows of season, all at $2.00 top, included: Mind the Paint with Billie Burke; The High Road with Mrs. Fiske; Years of Discretion with Frances Starr; Broadway Jones with George M. Cohan; and Hawthorne of the USA with Douglas Fairbanks.

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' Legit Stuff '

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Jean Bartel subbed for Lenore Lonergan, Of Thee I Sing...Actors Equity considering recommendations for new contract with League of NY Theatres due August 15th... American Theatre Wing summer session enrolled 700...Juanita Hall, South Pacific, gave Hotel Astor cocktail concert for Herald Tribune Fresh Air Fund.

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